

Jon Thomas Rowland

Michael was our best peeler. In an hour he could peel enough potatoes for twenty tenants. His narrow focus intensified the effort.

Our job was to start him and to keep him going. That could be a chore. First I had to find him to ask him if he'd do it. He never said no. What little pin money he got on Tuesday would be spent by Thursday if not before. It would be no more than the half-smoked cigarettes in the can on the porch, that Ellie relished. It would be in the half full cans of Coke that Adam balled her out for leaving on the steps, if Gabriel didn't find them first.

He'd usually be in his room, knitting while listening to his T.V. The picture didn't work. Babs had taught him and Jack and some of the other male tenants how to knit interminable swathes of wool. They'd never even be scarves. None of the female tenants was interested, but Michael and Jack liked the image of themselves knitting. Knitting was quiet and small, the way they thought of themselves. I think Babs enjoyed seeing men knit. It was Hercules spinning, or Monsieur Lefarge.

Michael used to enter the kitchen and freeze. He'd stand perfectly still with his empty knapsack dangling from his shoulder. He'd snap out of it when I reminded him to wash. He'd do it energetically at the sink under Babs's towel dispenser. Then he'd freeze-frame again till I handed him one of the stainless-steel bowls. He would take it into the